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The fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God

Eph. 3 - 9.

a recent English writer has ascribed ~~to writer in one of the recent English reviews,~~ ascribed to Unitarians what they have never made much boast of possessing, * something ~~and~~ which ~~is not~~, the reproaches of other people have sometimes made them believe themselves, almost, destitute, viz. great devotedness ~~to their~~ of religious feeling. -- (It is not seemly of course that we should indulge in much trumpeting of our own virtues, - But this writer I take it is not a Unitarian, - certainly not in any partisan sense, and It is very refreshing, amidst all the ~~tedious attempts~~ criticism to which we are subjected ~~to find fault with us~~, to hear one voice, raised now and again which speaks in more appreciative fashion ~~a generous appreciation~~, - When one of our meetings attracts public attention, a certain number of ministers representing the old theology ~~at~~ always feel called upon to set forth the weakness and failure of our position; and our astonishment ~~surprise~~ at the number of misstatements they contrive to make about us, would be unbounded, did we not know what astonishing views of all men and things

2 a little misunderstanding will engender,
~~they are accustomed to put forth.~~ – It is therefore
with a good deal of pleasant surprise that we find ourselves
looked at in a favorable light by an outside critic. –
The ~~article~~ author to whom I have referred ~~[illegible]~~ goes on to speak of
the many hymns we use, drawn from Catholic sources, –
and to close us with the Mother Church in the
spirit of devotions or devotion which characterizes our
religious services. – Of course outwardly the
differences are very marked; – The Catholic worships
by means of a profusion of symbols and forms, of
which we are almost entirely destitute. – But if
you attend a ~~the~~ Catholic service you cannot avoid
seeing that to the people who engage in it, the worship
is something very earnest and real, and not merely
a conventional show. – So, says this writer, among
Unitarians there is to be found in a special degree
the feeling that their service really means something
and ~~[illegible]~~ like the catholic they enter into it with
~~great~~ earnestness and sincerity. – – Now if devotions

means a noisy rush of feeling, such as we have learned to associate with the fashionable Camp. meetings,- or if on the other hand it means complying with certain fashionable forms & attitudes of devotion, then is some justice in what is so often said of us, that we are a cold, unfeeling & undevout people.- But- I do not think the person who bows in prayer upon entering church and instantly rises up to a cheerful and searching scrutiny of surrounding dresses or faces, imposes upon anybody. No one believes that there was any real devotion in that act of prayer.- But Devoutness means, at bottom, I think, Earnestness & Sincerity,- It means that, (by the use of form or without formality) the soul truly endeavors to lift its thoughts and desires to God, and feels the solemn significance of that endeavor.- If as I suppose that is the true meaning of the word devout, then we may claim that Unitarians, are at least no less devout than other christians.- Whether they are, in fact, any more devout than others, it is not necessary to inquire, But I do not pretend to say: but

I will say that they ought to be,-- ~~Because this fellowship is the fellowship of a mystery, and~~ Because there can be no spirit of true devotion, unless the presence of mystery, inspires solemnity and awe.- The Church of Rome has understood (perfectly what dependence to place upon the unknown) ~~this fully~~. and I suppose this to have been the reason for her persecution of Science.- Her Dogmas all embody a mystery, and she could not with safety to her own position allow the growing intellect to pry into the dark corners where her power was stored.---- Her use of the Latin language, prevents the ordinary worshipper from knowing what the priest is saying, and deprives his consciousness of the great mysteries of his religion.- The sacraments contain a host of miracles, which he believes it impious to try to fathom.- His salvation depends upon believing that the consecrated wafer is part of the body of Christ, and he never dreams of asking how the mysterious change from bread to flesh- is brought about.- His religion is full of mystery. and the outward world as he

for
is taught to look upon it, is full of ~~Miracles~~ miracles, which
he asks no explanation, -- ~~Even~~ God himself as to the
Catholic almost as unknown and unknowable as to
the disciples of the positive philosophy. - He will not pretend
that the dogma of the Trinity is at all luminous to his
understanding. - It remains for some conceited ~~apostle~~ expounder
of cheap logic, ~~like Bertini formal Jesuit Salmeron~~, to
expose his own shallowness, by trying to make the doctrine
of the Trinity plain to the intellect. The Catholic Church
says boldly - "it" is a mystery, not to be understood,"
and knows very well that otherwise it would have
had no great part to play in religious history. -
The Catholic, to be sure, "~~talks to~~ addresses" his patron saint,
with the utmost familiarity, and importunes his assistance
in almost an insolent way. - But behind the souls
of deputed human beings - to whom for the most part he
addresses his prayers, - Deity itself is to him awful and
incomprehensible. - There is no swagger of conceit, -
no business like familiarity of tone and manner, in the

prayer which the good catholic addresses to God as the Highest,- I say then that his devoutness is largely due to the mystery always present upon his notice and consciousness.- He feels continually the presence of something strange and solemn, ∧ ∇ mysterious which must needs ~~needs~~ compel him to earnestness and seriously,--

Now while we have given up all the artificial mysteries, upon which the church of the middle ages fed the piety and devotion of her Saints,- ~~Much more than the Protestants do~~, we have come to recognize the fact that at bottom, life is somewhere a mystery,- so far as we are concerned,--and this, (other things being equal,) ought to make us, ∧ the more devout ~~than~~.-- The man who walks in twilight, over an unknown road, will step by step - take the most careful heed to his way, while he who walks a familiar path - in broad daylight, will let his thoughts wander ~~carless~~ careless of his steps.- So with the great shadow of the unknown resting upon us, we shall walk the pathway of life with a somewhat

anxious caution, - whereas if we think we perfectly understand all know our way, and the nature of the forces surrounding us, we shall be more than likely to let our feet guide themselves, while our hearts are wholly absorbed in the work or play of the moment, --

The human intellect, having escaped the unjust tyranny so long exercised over it, - has in this Modern day become something of a tyrant itself. -- History abounds with examples of men and movements, which make this way to power, in the name of liberty, and then set up the most hateful and oppressive despotisms. - So reason, which for many centuries was held prisoner by religion, having rebelled, and attained its freedom, now turns about and attempts to enslave its former guardian. - (In this way, for ages - Religion has kept its chambers of mystery, sacred from intrusion, - and looked upon reason with instinctive dread, as the possible revealer of its secrets. - Surely enough the very first work of the emancipated reason - was to investigate these dark caves of superstition and myth and show the

world, that they contained nothing but ~~shown~~ known mysteries. -
But now, when religion has fallen back upon the real
mysteries of existence, - before which science and philosophy
~~also~~ also confess themselves baffled, - reason is beginning to
say, - "You shall not Even solace yourself with these ~~it~~, - You
have no ~~right~~ right to have to do with anything, save what
is plain & simple to ~~me~~ the logical faculties / This is the demand made
upon religion by the popular reason of the day, and it
is a demand to which some would be leaders of religious thought
are trying to conform. --- # Now whether or not
religion has any right to build upon ~~a~~ territory unknown
to science, - At any rate religion cannot live without
that atmosphere of mystery which is implied by the words
hope and faith. - and this rage to have everything made
entirely plain to the understanding is, ~~for it~~ when pushed to its
extreme, a deadly foe to religious life. -- Without doubt
the popular theology, and the popular preaching just
now, is that which makes people feel that they have
seen through all the ~~mysteries~~ dark places in human life

just now
and experience. -- Nothing is more distasteful ~~to~~ to the popular mind
~~further~~ than any statement from press or pulpit or rostrum, which contains something not to be readily understood. - People complain of not being able to understand such a writer as Mr. Emerson, ~~when they commonly mean~~ and it is more than implied that such writers do not themselves know what they ~~that they do not understand the facts which Mr. Emerson~~ are talking about ~~states~~. - An essayist declares that there can be no profound thinking, till the mind grasps together, such contradictory ideas as those of freedom and necessity, - and public journals hold the declaration up to ridicule as if it were entirely absurd and incomprehensible ~~the essayist did not know what he was talking about~~.

The public today esteems itself a philosopher, and entertains a certain rude system of thought, whereby it assumes to explain every existing fact. - Bring before it notice a fact not to be explained, and it is almost sure to deny the fact - rather than ~~and dreadfully unreasonable, than it feels obliged~~ give up its plausible theories. ~~to that it ought to explain the fact, and reconcile upon its plausible theories~~. - You will see evidence, that the crowd pays little attention to him who holds up a picture

of life as it is, with all its inconsistencies, and inexplicable ~~facts~~ realities. — While it does follow him who can build theories, to make it appear that all things are adjusted to a definite scheme or plan. — —

Now this will nigh universal desire to know all the knots and ~~knots~~ breaks in life's thread - explains away — has certain bad results - some of which I desire to point out. — — In the first place, it has a bad effect upon thought, ~~and~~ It results, for one thing, in a kind of foolish optimism, which is certainly not wholesome, and which may be positively pernicious. — — The presence of evil in the world, is a fact not to be wholly reconciled with our faith. — We make some attempt to explain how a perfectly wise and good creator, could deliberately provide for the existence of evil, and how actually, I think, driven the mystery into somewhat smaller compass. But when all is said that the clearest reason can say, the mystery is still there. — We must not ridicule the old doctrines of election and predestination, - At the worst they are only

rough and grotesque pictures, of what the mind forever affirms, viz. that the Omniscient God must be in some sense responsible for all the evil incident to the plan of his creation, — X How God can be, complete sovereign of the universe, and yet be in any sense the author of sin, is a puzzle over which our childrens children are like to exercise their brains, as hopelessly as did our calvinistic ancestors, — In early calvinism, whatever may have been its faults, there was a manly recognition of both the contradictory sides of life, — Certainly it was not a cheerful system of belief, but it was not forever making apologies for what the Almighty has decreed, and it did not try to explain away moral principles, to fit a certain theory, — and that is more than one can say, for some of its later modifications, — Orthodoxy has felt the force of this demand for consistency and plainness, and the attempt to make over its rugged old doctrines into something plausible, smooth, and consistent enough to suit the taste of the hour, results in sad illustrations

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of what human thought may come to. — A great deal of some sort of what is called liberal belief, consists simply in such a one sided statement of the facts of life, as will make it appear that the world is all sunshine, or at least that all darkness is on its way to become light. The modern liberal, as he looks back a few years is apt to be astonished at the ideas of God then entertained. Evidently he thinks the Love of God, His mercy and kindness had been entirely forgotten, and are now rediscovered by liberal thought. But it is not so. — The church has always declared that God is love. — The modern reason must not pluume itself on the attainment of a truth, which the world has held for centuries, — and has next need to be careful that in its desire to make all things conform to this idea, it does not lose sight of other truths of equal practical significance. — For the only way in which the intellect, can be made to fully understand the truth that God is love, — is by discarding, in some degree the moral perceptions. — While the world is seen to be full of sin and suffering, the reason will not

perfect

allow that divine goodness can be logically demonstrated.—
We may take John Stuart Mill as a very good representative
of pure logic, and his position, that we must ascribe
to Deity both the good & the bad attributes manifested
in the outward world, is on grounds of logic, unassailable,
so far as I can see,
I do not refer to this to weaken anybody's faith,
but only to give warning that faith must not expect too
much help from reason.— If we hope for intellect to
smooth away all difficulties of belief, and triumphantly
vindicate our confidence in goodness, by the use of scientific methods,
We hope for a great deal more than there is any
immediate
probability of attaining.— Evil is not, blessing in disguise,
and cannot (in any true sense of the words) be called
the means whereby men climb to higher good.— Yet this
is what men are sometimes led to call it, when they
set out to make experience a plain and luminous
illustration of the supremacy of the good.— In brief,
life is made up of elements which cannot be wholly
reconciled in our reason, and the perplexity arises to

reduce all things to an order ~~in thought~~, which the understanding can grasp. - leads, at last, to the practical elimination of certain facts which ought to enter into ones belief. - Then is no Mystery about human experience, some people will say. - The good are happy, the vicious miserable, or if the good do suffer for a time, their suffering helps them in the end. - But the ~~[redacted]~~ variations of fortune are not to be all explained by any such ~~[redacted]~~ philosophy - and one very sad result of the growth of ~~[redacted]~~ that philosophy, is the entire complacency with which men learn to look upon the hardships and distress of their fellows; satisfied as they are that the millwheels which ~~[redacted]~~ at present grind out such a cruel ~~good~~ load of broken hearts and shattered lives, in some way minister, to the highest good of their victims. - - I desire to warn all young people especially against seeking or accepting any scheme or system of belief, which professes to do away with all contradictions in thought. Make up your mind that there are contradictions, some of them at least, ~~[redacted]~~ have

been in the world from the beginning, and that we must do what our fathers ~~have~~ have done before us, acknowledge their presence, and get on with them as best we may. - It is doubtless true that much is written & spoken upon life's graver problems, which might be couched in ~~words~~ plainer language, But take care that in complaining of the obscurity of what you read or hear, you are not complaining of the obscurity which hangs like a veil over all the depths of thought and feeling. - It is useless to rebel against that. Indeed it is dangerous to one's moral health, to seek a too explicit understanding of mysteries, which are hid in God, away from the reach of our feeble intellects. — —

In the second place, the overweening confidence of reason in its right and ability to ~~banish all~~ banish all mysteries from the realm of human thought, - has certain bad results upon feeling and emotion. -- Just so sure, as one allows his mind to rest in some theory of the Universe as a finished and complete picture of God's Creation

9 will
~~[illegible]~~ he lose that sense of awe, and reverent respect, with which the thought of God should fill his mind.-- This is the most weighty charge one can bring against the old theology.-- Most of the talk about the "immoralities of orthodoxy" is entirely beside the mark.-- ~~It~~ The hatred of sin - which influenced those who gave that theology ~~[illegible]~~ form, was much more healthful and sane, than the ~~[illegible]~~ nerveless toleration of evil which sometimes styles itself liberal.-- But the old theology got everything reduced to such a painfully definite and detailed plan, that its inevitable effect, was to weaken the great emotions to which religion ought to give full play.- It is very dispiriting ~~to day~~ to sit in some churches when this plan is practised and fully believed, and listen to the familiar advice, remonstrance - and demand, which are addressed to the ear of God.-
Such people, we are driven to think - can
Such people, have no great longings, no strong anguish no glowing hopes.- no sense of any profound depths above them or below.- They must live wholly in a world

of surface realities, and ~~are~~ be ~~they~~ occupied only with what lies immediately about them.— Outward respectability is their criterion of righteousness,— perfect external beauty and harmony is their idea of heaven,— the regulation of their lives so that they may enjoy happiness and plenty, is their sole conception of divine providence.—

They have had the secrets of the almighty revealed to them,— They need be under no apprehension about their salvation, when they get ready to attend to it; Life is all as plain and simple to them, as the working of the simplest machine.— They are neither oppressed nor inspired, by any sense of mystery,— ~~but~~ and seeing nothing to wonder at, or never taking the trouble to remember that anything lies beyond their horizon, how could it be expected that they should ever feel the power of any great emotion? They have of course their excitements and their joys,— but there can be nothing sublime in their religious enthusiasm,— and no great depth or strength in their religious aspirations.

10 All things become [illegible] and matter-of-fact, to the mind which believes itself to have grasped the perfect explanation of this origin and history. - How can men and women pronounce the name of God as they ought, when [illegible] Him is in their minds no sense of the infinite depths of His Being, behind all they can possibly know of Him? Their theology instead of a symbol, to suggest a world of meaning which cannot be crowded into letter or text, becomes so to speak a complete map of infinitude, - # It is necessary (some [illegible] say), that the majority of people should think of God in this definite, limited way, - and it may be so [illegible], - But all the same it makes impossible to them any profound religious feeling [illegible]. - - What should we care for Niagara, if there were not something dread and awful in its majestic leap, and we did not feel the presence of a power against which the strength of our arm would be utterly futile? - Even in love there is mingled an element of awe which holds apart

the hearts, that attract each other, and makes them timid and self distrustful in each others presence, - Because love looks beyond what is intelligible, into mysterious recesses of thought and feeling, which are dim and vague and undefined, - and the stronger love is, the less does the lover feel that he can fathom the soul to which he is drawn, - There can be no deep love which does not carry with the heart a sense of wounding awe - and even somewhat of timidity, such as is caught from a glimpse of infinitude - The perception of what is worthy to be loved makes one self distrustful, and somewhat doubtful of ones fitness to be loved in return, -

To love, is to strive daily and hourly to win an increasing affection, and to bear always in mind the dread of forfeiting that affection, - As children of God we cannot be said to love our Creator, while we are indifferent whether or not we merit His regard, -

People who feel sure that God will continue to regard them with equal favor, whatever they do, - can have little perception

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of the infinite holiness, which makes ~~him~~ Him the object of our highest love.- Certainly we may rejoice that the name of deity has lost the superstitious horror once attached to it,- But- all the same it is possible that our confidence in God may be quite too shallow and short sighted.- For my part, nothing seems to me further removed from truly religious feeling, than the perfect ease and assurance with which some souls look up to God, displaying an entire ~~and utter entire~~ lack of any real solemnity, in this presence,- I believe that such familiarity with the Almighty is neither sane nor wholesome. It weakens reputt, destroys reverence, and leads men to think of Omnipotence, merely as the means by which (through prayer) they can secure the fulfillment of their desires.-- The Being of God, is to the enlightened understanding, a fathomless mystery,- ~~The~~ ~~much talked about~~ ~~talk about~~ a scientific theology- is not at all adequate to ~~seems to me entirely~~ ~~unadapted for~~ explain this mystery,- ~~fatile~~. And if that supplanting were possible of attainment, it would be the last thing we should desire,- For, it would mean

the decay of those religious sentiments, which have been the worlds greatest scorns of life and joy. — I no more want my thought of God to chrystalize into fixed and forfully logical shapes. - than I want the clouds of heaven to arrange themselves into regular geometric forms. — all our conceptions of divinity are symbols, by which we interpret to ourselves its infinite mystery. - ~~and~~ Losing sight of the symbolic nature of our beliefs, we lose sight of the mystery behind, and so miss the sublime emotions which that mystery inspires. — —

It is a significant phrase, this of St. Pauls, - "the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God." — True religious fellowship is, and must always remain, the fellowship of a mystery. - It is not possible to fathom the secrets which God has hidden from us — (and this impossibility is the opportunity of religion) However far science may explore the realms of being, (and we have ~~good~~ some reason to believe that she has nearly reached the farthest limits of progress.) there remains beyond, the infinite ~~realm~~ Domain of the unknown - into which

we can only send our hope and faith. – This great craving of the modern mind, to know spiritual truths all made plain and simple, – which is in great measure only the fever of false expectation raised by the rapid growth of science, is a craving which cannot be legitimately satisfied. – People may cease thinking for themselves, and allow some ~~~~ delusion thing to settle into their minds till it acquires the form of knowledge. – That indeed is what a great mass of people prefer to do. – ~~~~ But whatever gratification they may purchase in this way is dearly paid for, in the decay of thought and emotion which must result. – – – The only manly and courageous way to meet life's uncertainties and contradictions, is to confess that they are uncertainties and contradictions, – and that is the only way to keep one's soul alive to uplifting and inspiring influences. – Despite our belief in the moral government of the world, we cannot always see, or prove, that the good are rewarded and the guilty punished. – And on the one side full recognition of this

failure leads some minds into atheism; scarcely less to be dreaded on the other hand is the phenomenon which results from refusing to admit the facts of life as they are. —

The denial of God to which Job was tempted by his afflictions, was a no worse form of mind than the hardened and unsympathetic spirit of his counsellors, who were sure that only some dreadful sin, could explain Job's misfortune. —

There is a middle pathway between ~~certainty of belief~~ uncertainty, and an unwarranted confidence; This ~~would~~ pathway Job at last found. — His oppression was not explained to him, but his faith learned to face the evident cruelty and injustice of his lot, — fully admitting that it was cruelty, and yet losing nothing of its reliance upon God. — To find that pathway is the problem set before us. — We are not called upon to demonstrate the rule of goodness and love in every particular. — We cannot do that if we wish, and we need not desire to do it; some faith still remains possible to us. — I say — do not dream that in this life at least you can have

all things satisfactorily explained to you, - and do not trust any theory or plan which professes to reveal the mystery which from the beginning hath been hid in God. —

It remains for us in this world, only to hope that in a future life we shall see with clearer vision, and to be true to the highest certainty we can perceive, however perplexed we may be by opposing realities. — And this after all is not so difficult, - For the heart will make its voice heard. Despite of opposing logic and experience — Our souls carry always a confidence that God has hidden his purposes from us, with benificent intent, and that when the mystery is made plain - it will be brighter than our brightest hopes. — Then is no use, and even much folly in trying to cover up what is now dark and uncertain, - but it is the mission of religion to make hope & faith strong enough to bear the sight of all iniquity and pain, without becoming disheartened or abashed. — The true christian heart admits wholly the skeptical reason can allege. - It weeps for the innocent suffers. - It rebels

against the cruelty of natural law. ~~It~~ is hot with indignation against the tyrant and betrayer. - And yet always it listens to a voice bidding it, ~~thankful~~ be peaceful and content, since God is above all, - ~~It is there, you see, an~~ The soul itself, is thus an ~~living~~ embodied contradiction, - while it is disturbed and even dismayed by the evil with which the earth seems filled. it ~~is~~ is also able to attain to a solemn within itself ~~perfect~~ rest and peace in the confidence that goodness reigns supreme, - Life is everywhere pervaded with these contradictions, - They enter into our conception of God and his government, and ~~are not to be explained~~ ~~away~~. - They make even our own hearts, to ourselves ~~mysteries~~, ~~and render the nature of God impossible to~~ ~~be fully defined or understood by us.~~ of life incomprehensible

But just for this very reason is the thought of God sublime, and because religion deals with ideas and hopes so much larger and grander than the imagination can grasp ~~intellect~~, religion has commanded the thought, the labor, and the treasure of the world, as no other power could. -

When men stand before a ~~deity~~ God whom they believe, always

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be guided by their prayers, and ~~the~~ with whose motives and methods they believe themselves entirely familiar, they cannot be greatly moved.— ~~But~~ Only when we look up to a power - dread, unfathomable, and alone, - a power which we cannot limit or define by any ~~effort of the imagination~~ effort of the reason, but which we know to be here in our midst, listening even to our inmost thoughts; - when the God to whom we pray holds in his hands rewards and punishments whose extent we have no power to estimate, and shifts our fortunes in accordance with purposes which stretch away into depths inscrutable to our understandings, — ~~to us;~~ When His greatness, His wisdom & His will, instead of magnified reflections of our own, become in our regard infinitely greater than anything we can conceive, ~~do~~ Only then we ~~not then~~ find our souls full of those intense emotions, which words can never begin to express? - The Soul being itself a mysterious power, is attuned to Mystery. Our deepest heartstrings will not vibrate to the touch of worldly knowledge; - It is only when they are swept by an unseen hand, or stirred by celestial breezes (from the realm of the undefined) that the music of

the soul is awakened,— Of a truth there can be no
devoutness in religion, till the heart bows before a God
whom no searching will reveal, save in broken glimpses
(and the fellowship of the
noblest souls
~~saints~~ is one which grows out of the common perception of
the infinite gulfs in which our lives hang poised,—
Around our souls
~~us~~ on every side are fathomless spaces;- and the
stars are not further away from the earth, than our hearts seem
removed from all definite reality on which to rely,- But down
through these realms of mystery, reaches the strong arm of
a spiritual gravitation,— making even the clouds of hope like
a solid pathway ~~for us~~ - along which we may walk in
softly peace,- ~~But~~ Whither ~~we~~ we walk?- Who can tell!
But it is
Enough that the mystery surrounding us, takes on intelligence
and love, and becomes an infinite Fatherhood! A mystery still,
but one which holds all souls in a kindly embrace,- Enough
for
that to-day and to-morrow - it has made us a way on into
the unknown, which we may tread with God-like thoughts and
inspirers filling our souls
~~filling within us~~ and with a calm trust in
the blessedness of the unknown destiny prepared for us, hushing
all our repinings and forbodings to rest —